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SUBJECT: DASD HUDDLESTON AND RWANDAN DEFENSE REVIEW
PRIORITIES AND COOPERATION

Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 c, d.

¶1. (C) Summary. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Huddleston met October 26 with Rwandan Minister of Defense Gatsinzi and senior Rwandan Defense Force officers, including Chief of Defense (CHOD) Kabarebe. The Rwandans thanked DASD for USG cooperation on peacekeeping and highlighted the Rwandan military's civil military activities. They underscored as their top priority strengthening their partnership with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The CHOD stressed the importance of ending the FDLR presence in the DRC and was visibly pleased recounting the improvement in DRC-Rwandan relations as reflected by their pending exchange of Ambassadors (the Congolese Ambassador arrived November 2) and by continued cooperation on security and regional economic issues. DASD congratulated the Rwandans on their civil-military focus, calling it a good example to others in the region. She thanked the MOD for Rwanda's leading role in the UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. She also commended the joint DRC-Rwandan effort to end the FDLR presence in the DRC last spring and both countries efforts to deepen their cooperation. DASD voiced strong USG interest in a continued close mil-mil partnership with Rwanda. End Summary.

¶2. (U) MOD Gatsinzi welcomed DASD Huddleston, and her delegation including Brigadier General Farris. The MOD thanked the United States for our military to military cooperation, praising the role of AFRICOM and the Embassy's Defense Attaché's office in supporting training, equipping and deployment of Rwanda's peacekeepers in Darfur. He urged continued close cooperation. The MOD highlighted increasingly strong regional ties between Rwanda and the other countries of the East African Community, including recent joint exercises. DASD Huddleston noted that she had heard a similar message in Uganda and commended Rwanda for its recent participation in joint exercises under AFRICOM sponsorship in Uganda. She cited as particularly positive the fact that a Burundian contingent moved to Uganda via an overnight in Rwanda. .

¶3. (C) J-2 General Jack Musemakweli briefed on the Rwanda defense forces operations, and objectives. He described successes of the joint operation Umoja Wetu (Our Unity) and follow-on operations by the FARDC. Since January 2009, they precipitated the return of more than 1000 combatants, mostly from the FDLR ranks, and almost 10,000 noncombatants who had been in areas under FDLR control. The FDLR threat remains, he said, calling continued action against their leaders Rwanda's top operational priority in the region. General Kabarebe, the RDF CHOD, warned that the FDLR was moving from large unit to small unit guerrilla tactics because it was being dispersed. Rwanda is concerned, he noted, that the FDLR may turn increasingly to terrorism as a result of its

losses on the battlefield. (Comment: The FDLR and predecessor organizations have previously employed terrorist tactics in the DRC and in Rwanda. However, Kabarebe's warning reflects an increased risk that the FDLR may, as he put it, "seek to attack vulnerable sites such as infrastructure or tourism" in the future. This is a potential danger that bears close scrutiny. End Comment.

¶ 14. (C) The J-2 said that the RDF emphasis at home had shifted from securing its borders against cross-border infiltration to an increased focus on civil-military operations. He highlighted the result of a recent nation-wide "Army Week" that was prolonged for almost a month. During that period Rwandan soldiers including medical doctors supported by private doctors conducted more than five hundred eye surgeries and many other medical procedures. They also improved farm to market roads, donated milk cows to individual farmers, constructed schoolhouses, and performed veterinary operations. DASD Huddleston noted that Rwanda was an African leader of civil-military operations and praised their example.

¶ 15. (C) Kabarebe and Musemakweli noted that they had just returned the day before from inspecting Rwandan peacekeepers in Darfur. They described the situation at the moment as relatively stable but highlighted the political complication of that operating environment. They claimed that RDF forces were widely hailed because they sought to apply there the same civil-military engagement that they used at home. "We go beyond the narrow requirements of our peacekeeping duties," Kabarebe said proudly, and "we have good relations with all parties: the IDPs, NGO workers, other peacekeeping contingents, government troops, and rebel forces."

¶ 16. (C) Kabarebe described with visible satisfaction warming relations with the DRC. He indicated that he expected the DRC Ambassador to Rwanda to arrive the next day (the DRC Ambassador has now arrived, septel). Kabarebe said he had just talked to Rwanda's Ambassador to the DRC and he said he had been well received and supported by DRC officials who had welcomed him and provided all needed assistance. Kabarebe said this development, like the joint operation and ongoing talks on ongoing cooperation, reflected years of work by Rwanda nurturing the relationship, with great skill, he added, smiling. (Comment: Kabarebe is well-acquainted with the Congo, having served there during the wars of the late 90s and early 2000s -- including a short stint as chief of staff of the Congolese army. End Comment.)

¶ 17. (C) Comment: The Rwandans described the focus of their efforts as "consolidating peace so we can sustain development," as Kabarebe put it. They said Rwanda "needs peace more than the others" and called their goal "peace for a purpose," The Rwandans' warm greeting of DASD Huddleston and her delegation reflects our strong ties on military cooperation, especially in Darfur. Their emphasis on strengthening further Rwanda's partnership with the DRC and pressing operations against the FDLR are consistent with GOR statements since November 2008. There were two new notes sounded in this meeting. The first was the uncharacteristic satisfaction that CHOD Kabarebe showed in recent Rwandan-DRC progress. The second was the explicit concern that the FDLR may turn to terrorism. We should not take for granted the Rwandan-DRC partnership. Instead, we need to take every step we can to underscore to both countries their mutual benefit. We also need to continue to work to end the FDLR's influence in the Congo and its harm to the DRC and threats to Rwanda. This will require continued UN support for ongoing military operations against the FDLR with USG advocacy and assistance to ensure that the FDLR is defeated at the lowest possible cost to noncombatants. While terrorism is not new to the FDLR, we need to seek ways to buttress Rwanda's capacity to detect, deter and defeat possibly increased threats of terrorism. One critical way is to continue efforts with international partners to cut off support from abroad for the FDLR by identifying and bringing to justice their leaders and supporters wherever they are found. End Comment.

¶8. (U) DASD Huddleston did not clear this message.
SYMINGTON